

LAKE COUNTY

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OUR VIEW

Power politics

Lake Countians have received a lesson in how things get done in Springfield via state Sen. Terry Link, D-Waukegan, who torpedoed a bill to allow the dredging of Waukegan Harbor to a depth of 23 feet.

At 23 feet, deep draft lake boats could enter the harbor and deliver and pick up cargo from the remaining lakefront companies. Instead, Link torpedoed a bill introduced by fellow Democrat and Waukeganite, state Rep. Eddie Washington. Link, doing the bidding of Waukegan city officials, made no bones of his dislike for the measure: "I want the harbor capped and the city wants it capped. We don't want it dredged."

Using that "royal we" pronoun is somewhat disconcerting since the last we looked we didn't see any poll numbers on how Waukeganites feel on the future of the north end of the harbor, which has been home for decades to taxpaying industry. The city wants the harbor-located businesses gone, replaced in the latest long-range plan with more recreational boaters and condominiums, like those dream condos rising on the bluff overlooking the harbor. You know the ones.

Unlike power boating, Link used power politics, signing on as a Senate sponsor just in order to kill House Bill 2088. Washington accuses Link of conspiring with fellow House Democrat, Kathy Ryg of Vernon Hills. In another of those politics-makes-strange-bed-fellows moments, two Republicans, state Reps. JoAnn Osmond of Antioch and Sandy Cole of Grayslake, lined up with Washington in support of the bill. As an aside, Washington accepted about \$20,000 in campaign contributions over two years from those same

lakefront industries. That, too, is how things get done in Springfield.

At one time, the city, federal, state and county governments agreed to rid the harbor of the remaining polychlorinated biphenyls, left by Outboard Marine Corp. As much as \$43 million was pledged to fund the removal of PCBs, including \$36 million alone in a Great Lakes Legacy Act grant from the feds.

But that money is long gone after the Waukegan City Council scuttled the plan, revealing the intent to eject current harbor industries and redevelop the harbor exclusively for recreational and residential uses. Former harbor partners believe recreation, condos and industry can coexist.

Without the funding, the city turned to suing the current industries, forcing them to either leave or pay \$23 million to remove the remaining PCBs, even though it has not been proven the companies at the harbor dumped the chemicals. How long the case will drag through the courts is any attorney's guess; the firms have made no movement to start packing.

In the current economic climate, we think taxpaying, job-providing companies are what Waukegan officials would want to retain within the city's limits. Instead, officials, with the help of Sen. Link, continue on point to rid the harbor of the city's industrial legacy while giving us lessons on how things really get done.